

Share and Strife

The Strait of Melaka and the Portuguese (16th and 17th centuries)

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Introduction

The Strait of Melaka is the longest strait in the world, stretching for about 800 km from the northern tip of Sumatra to Singapore. It exhibits a dual character like no other, being simultaneously a privileged linking passage of two seas and two knots of human civilization – India and China – and a »bottleneck« that constrains the maritime connections between them. Today, the latter aspect is globally dominant. The strait is considered and analysed mostly as an obstacle rather than a linking point: how to reach China from the West or elsewhere is no longer an issue, but securing the vital flows that pass into the strait on a daily basis undoubtedly is. Accidents, natural catastrophes, political local crises or terrorist attacks are permanent dangers that could cut this umbilical cord of world trade and jeopardize a particularly sensitive and vulnerable area; piracy and pollution are the most common local threats and vulnerabilities.¹

Over 60,000 vessels pass this »bottleneck« point every year, making it one of the most sensitive passage areas in sea lanes all over the world. In the narrowest point near Singapore, the Strait is less than three kilometres wide, which increases the risk of collisions and other accidents. If the strait was blocked, nearly half of the world's fleet

¹ Hans-Dieter Evers and Solvay Gerke, »The Strategic Importance of the Straits of Malacca for World Trade and Regional Development«, in: *ZEF Working Papers*, University of Bonn, 2006, pp. 8–12; Peter Lehr (ed.), *Violence at Sea – Piracy in the Age of Global Terrorism*, New York: Routledge, 2007.

would have to reroute around the Indonesian Archipelago; several scenarios have been extensively studied.² The notion of *chokepoint* has been adopted, from the vocabulary of world oil transit, to describe the peculiar status of the Strait – side-by-side with Bab al-Mandab and Hormuz – as the shortest and the most used sea route between the Persian Gulf and Middle East supply areas and the demanding markets of Japan, China and South Korea.³

Today, the Strait of Melaka is mostly seen as a danger to world economy and a sensitive chord in the regional balance. Throughout history notwithstanding, it was considered mostly as a connecting spot, more a *sharepoint* than a *chokepoint*. The Portuguese, being the first Europeans to settle in the region, kept this feature throughout their rule in Melaka. In fact, it was only in the 19th century that a colonial power came to raise the risks of this *chokepoint* feature and to ensure the safeguard of its global Asian interests through a careful surveillance of the Strait. The acquisition of Penang, and later the foundation of Singapore were unequivocal signs of how sensitive and important it was to the British to have a presence on the Strait. The following Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 and the foundation of the Straits Settlements definitely established the area as vital to the rising British Empire.

Five hundred years ago, the general landscape of world trade was much different from now and certainly there was no risk of oil spills. But the Strait of Melaka was already a vital key point of Asian trade, pirates were a real danger to merchants, commodities and routes and political control over this sensitive passage was a permanent source of tension and conflict. The homonymous city was a prosperous and famous sultanate that caught the attention of the Portuguese from the beginning of their presence in Asia. Some questions concerning the Strait are to be raised in the context of the arrival of the Portuguese, the conquest of Melaka and the general conditions of management of their presence in the area, for more than a century.

² U.S. Energy Information Administration, »World oil transit chokepoints«, updated Dec. 30, 2011, <http://205.254.135.7/countries/regions-topics.cfm?fips=WOTC>; John H. Noer and David Gregory, *Chokepoints: Maritime Economic Concerns in Southeast Asia*, Washington: National Defense University Press, 1996, pp. 31–37.

³ Jean-Paul Rodrigue, »Straits, Passages and Chokepoints – A Maritime Geostrategy of Petroleum Distribution«, in: *Cahiers de Géographie du Québec*, 48, 135, 2004, pp. 369–370.

Melaka, a City and a Strait

The Strait of Melaka acquired an international dimension from the time of the empire of Srivijaya (7th–13th centuries), when a permanent trade link between India and China was established. The control of the passage was the main cause of the competition among rival states; Srivijaya eventually emerged as victorious and dominant for several centuries.⁴ Later on, a new city that claimed to be the heir of this vanished empire was founded on the Malay Peninsula and developed throughout the 15th century. Its importance and prestige came to give the name to the strait where it was located. Like the Srivijaya empire, the Sultanate of Melaka was able to exercise some control on both sides of the strait and it emerged as a pivotal centre for Indian Ocean trade, at the intersection of regional networks, namely the Bay of Bengal, South China Sea and Java Sea.⁵ Privileged relations with Ming China provided protection against Thai and Javanese political ambitions, and the development of mutually beneficial connections with Gujarati, Hindu and Northern Java merchants allowed a confluence of a wide range of trade interests, from the western markets to the Moluccas. As Keith Taylor put it, »Melaka quickly became a new version of the Srivijayan model of a Malay-led international entrepôt.«⁶

In fact, the privileged position of this »interface of three worlds« – India, China and the Malay-Indonesian archipelago – not only was able to control its main maritime passage, but was located on the linking spot of two different monsoon winds that fuelled navigation and trade.⁷ As the Portuguese Tomé Pires stated in the 1510s, »Melaka is a city that has been built for trade, higher than any other in the whole world, at the end of monsoons and beginning of others. Melaka is surrounded and stands in the middle, and receives trade and commerce from a large spectre of nations, a thousand leagues from each side.«⁸

⁴ Mark Cleary and Goh Kim Chuan, *Environment and Development in the Straits of Malacca*, London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 85–87.

⁵ Kenneth R. Hall, »Local and International Trade and Traders in the Straits of Melaka Region: 600–1500«, in: *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 47, 2, 2004, p. 249.

⁶ Keith W. Taylor, »The Early Kingdoms«, in: Nicholas Tarling (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, 4 vols., Cambridge University Press, 1999, I, 1, p. 175.

⁷ Manuel Lobato, »Malaca«, in: A. H. de Oliveira Marques (ed.), *História dos Portugueses no Extremo Oriente*, 5 vols, Lisbon: Fundação Oriente, 2000, I, II, pp. 16–17.

⁸ Armando Cortesão (ed.), *A Suma Oriental de Tomé Pires*, Coimbra: Imp. da Universidade,

The aim of the Portuguese was the city, not the Strait. In fact, they did not consider it as a real »strait« or »passage«. At an early stage, simple references to »*the strait*« in Portuguese documents relate to the Bab al-Mandab one. Later on, they would point to the existence of two »real« channels: the narrow passage near Singapore used for the navigation to and from China, and another one they called »Strait of Sabang«, between Sumatra and the island of Kundur, mostly used to access Java and the Lesser Sunda islands.⁹ The name »Strait of Melaka« is generally absent from Portuguese sources because they probably considered it too wide to be called so. The Malay-Portuguese Manuel Godinho de Erédia, who had an accurate vision of the surroundings of Melaka, calls the Strait the »Malayo Sea« (*mar malaio*), saying it was the »land-enclosed sea« (*mar mediterrâneo*) between Johor and Sumatra.¹⁰ The first mention of the »Strait of Melaka« in Portuguese cartography is possibly the one in the charts of the »Livro das Plantas das Fortalezas« of Vila Viçosa, dated somewhere between 1620 and 1640.¹¹

The fame of the city resounded throughout Asia and captured the attention of the European newcomers at their very first incursion in the East. It was on Vasco da Gama's voyage that the first information was collected: »an island ... with a Christian King« at 40 days' sail from Calicut, where all cloves came from, and also nutmeg, porcelain, silk and tin.¹² This pack of information proved to be only partly true, but the basic data was valid: a trade post where Asian luxury commodities could be accessed. In the following years, while establishing themselves along the western coast of India and trying to get a grip on the Malabar spice trade, the Portuguese sent messages to the King D. Ma-

1978, p. 441.

⁹ Paulo Jorge de Sousa Pinto, *The Portuguese and the Straits of Melaka, 1579–1619 – Power, Trade and Diplomacy*, Singapore University Press, 2012, pp. 54 and 149. On this issue, check Peter Borschberg, »Remapping the Straits of Singapore? New Insights from Old Sources« in: Peter Borschberg (ed.), *Iberians in the Singapore-Melaka Area and Adjacent Regions (16th to 18th Century)*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004, pp. 93–130.

¹⁰ J. V. Mills (ed.), »Eredia's Description of Malaca, Meridional India, and Cathay«, in: *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, VIII, 1, 1930, p. 42.

¹¹ *Livro das plantas das fortalezas, cidades e povoações do Estado da Índia Oriental com as descrições do marítimo dos Reinos e Províncias...* Paço Ducal de Vila Viçosa, Vila Viçosa, Portugal, cod. 1471, pl. 14–15.

¹² E. G. Ravenstein (ed.), *A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco da Gama, 1497–1499*, London: The Hakluyt Society, 1898, pp. 77, 100.

nel, referring to the rich commodities that were waiting for them eastwards. Melaka was mentioned as the main source of this wealth and an important foothold on the way to the kingdom of China.¹³

These initial years were mostly exploratory and prospective and the range of the Portuguese presence did not go beyond Sri Lanka. The first viceroy, D. Francisco de Almeida (1505–1508), focused on the Malabar spices, the Mamluk naval threat and erecting the first Portuguese fortresses in the East. Despite the orders he received to quickly move forward to establish a factory and build a fortress in Melaka, nothing was achieved. Melaka and Southeast Asia were far away from the Portuguese immediate interests in Asia, and their premature arrival in the region, in 1509, may only be fully understood if one considers the global projects of King D. Manuel. These were strongly influenced by his Messianism and focused on the blockade of the Bab al-Mandab strait and the disruption of Muslim trade, that would lead ultimately to the fall of the Mamluk Sultanate of Cairo and the recovery of Jerusalem for Christendom.¹⁴

Melaka was notwithstanding an important piece of his Asian project and he urged the Viceroy to send a ship there as soon as possible, for two main reasons: first, to access the spices and other commodities that were said to flow to the city, and thence to India and the Middle East by means of Muslim traders; second, to get there before the Spanish rivals eventually did, because there were rumours that Melaka could be in the hemisphere conceded to Castille according to the Treaty of Tordesillas.¹⁵

Because the first viceroy was reluctant to reach Melaka, the King decided to send an armada from Lisbon with that specific goal. In 1508, Diogo Lopes de Sequeira left Portugal and arrived in the Southeast Asia region the following year. His misfortunes in Melaka are well-known:

¹³ »Summary of all the letters that came from India«, 1506, in: R. A. Bulhão Pato (ed.), *Cartas de Afonso de Albuquerque*, 3 vols., Lisbon: Academia Real das Ciências, 1898, II, pp. 390–392.

¹⁴ Luís Filipe Thomaz, »Factions, interests and messianism: The politics of Portuguese expansion in the east, 1500–1521«, in: *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 28, 1, 1991, pp. 99–103. About D. Manuel's imperial projects, see Luís Filipe Thomaz, *L'Idée Impériale Manueline*, Paris: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1990.

¹⁵ Letter from King D. Manuel to the viceroy D. Francisco de Almeida, 1506, in: R. A. Bulhão Pato (ed.), *Cartas de Afonso de Albuquerque*, III, pp. 269–271.

initially welcomed by the Sultan Mahmud Syah, the Portuguese saw their movements and range of action curtailed by the powerful Gujarati community, who eventually convinced the local *Bendahara* and the Sultan to expel and imprison the newcomers. The tide would change when a captain who shared D. Manuel's points of view took office as the new Governor. This was Afonso de Albuquerque, who became known as the builder of the foundations of the Portuguese *Estado da Índia*.

Afonso de Albuquerque, a Global Strategist

Much has been said about Afonso de Albuquerque and his actions in Asia. His most recent biography stresses the complex character of a conqueror and strategist whose main ability was to understand the complexity of Asian trade and to think and act in a global scope.¹⁶ So it was, in fact. He was probably the first man in world history to devise a global strategy to control the main fluxes of Maritime Asia as a whole, from the east coast of Africa to Southeast Asia, in the service of a European power. He was surely convinced he had achieved this goal, as he said to the King just a few days before passing away, in a famous statement: »I leave [you] India with its main heads under your authority, with no other unfinished task other than closing very well the gates of the Strait [of Bab al-Mandab]«.¹⁷

This global strategy was focused on controlling the most important »gates« (i.e., straits) of the Indian Ocean, and at the same time knocking down the power of the Sultan of Cairo and his Venetian allies. The conquest of Goa was an exception, but it had specific motives: its strategic position, its central role in Indian trade and its own attributes made it a valuable prey.¹⁸ In this context, the Strait of Melaka was a secondary and ill-placed target, despite Tomé Pires' famous statement that »whoever is Lord of Melaka has his hands on the throat of Venice«. The conquest of the city, in 1511, was the outcome of a personal decision by the Governor and did not correspond to a previously accorded

¹⁶ Geneviève Bouchon, *Albuquerque, le lion des mers d'Asie* (Paris: Ed. Desjonquères, 1992).

¹⁷ Letter from Afonso de Albuquerque to King D. Manuel, Dec. 6 1515, in: R. A. Bulhão Pato (ed.), *Cartas de Afonso de Albuquerque*, I, p. 381.

¹⁸ Catarina Madeira Santos, «Goa é a chave de toda a Índia» – *Perfil político da capital do Estado da Índia (1505–1570)*, Lisbon: Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, 1999, p. 94.

plan or a clear command from Lisbon. On the contrary, his feats of arms raised an outcry of protests and complaints to the King, namely from an influential group of Portuguese settled in India – the so-called »group of Cochin« – who fiercely opposed Albuquerque's plans and whose interests were severely threatened by the takeover of Goa and Melaka.¹⁹ However, it did not prevent the King ordering the edition of a booklet written in Latin and published in Italy to advertise the conquest of Melaka throughout Europe.²⁰

The Portuguese were expected to use their naval power to force the Sultan to sign a favourable treaty, eventually to the detriment of Muslim communities – as they tried to in Calicut – and to build a fortress. The conquest of the city, far from the Malabar Coast and Portuguese naval bases, was apparently out of the question. Albuquerque's overconfidence and bold character led him to make a risky move, but one may also point to misconception and bad judgement as plausible causes of the decision. The Portuguese captives in Melaka eventually gave the Governor the push to attack. One of them, Rui de Araújo, managed to send a letter to Albuquerque in February 1510 where he described the weakness of the Sultan's forces and urged Albuquerque to conquer the city.²¹ However, the Chinese and Hindu merchants were the main source of information. These, namely a Hindu *Keling* from the Coromandel Coast called Nina Chatu who was his advisor on this issue,²² were certainly interested in persuading the Governor to solve the conflict with the Sultan by force, for it would allow them to supersede the Gujarati community that was dominant in the sultanate.

Albuquerque did not hesitate to launch an assault on the city. Apparently, the decision was taken before his arrival on the Strait. To achieve a military victory over Mahmud Syah's army was a remarkable feat of arms, but keeping the city was a different and a rather more com-

¹⁹ Inácio Guerreiro and Vítor Luís Gaspar Rodrigues, »O Grupo de Cochim e a oposição a Afonso de Albuquerque«, in: *Stvdia*, 51, 1992, p. 133.

²⁰ Jean Aubin and Luís Filipe Thomaz, »Un opusculé latin sur la prise de Malacca par les Portugais, imprimé en Italie en 1514«, in: *Archipel*, 74, 2007, pp. 107–138.

²¹ Letter from Rui de Araújo to Albuquerque, Feb. 1510, in: A. Basílio de Sá (ed.), *Documentação para a História do Padroado Português do Oriente – Insulíndia*, 6 vols., Lisbon: Agência Geral do Ultramar, 1954, I, p. 20.

²² Luís Filipe Thomaz, »Nina Chatu e o comércio português em Malaca« in: *De Ceuta a Timor*. Lisbon: Difel, 1994, p. 487.

plex issue. Albuquerque realized that to secure his victory, he needed to frame Melaka into Portugal's global expansion in Asia, proving to his King and those who opposed him that the conquest had not been an inconsistent adventure. In order to do so, he stayed there for several months. There were three main goals to achieve. Firstly, he needed to prove that Melaka, despite being located so far away from India, would open the gates to the Far East, namely the Spice Islands. That was the aim of the expedition led by António de Abreu and the junk of *nakhoda* Ismail that preceded it. One of his men, Francisco Serrão, managed to arrive in the Moluccas after a troubled journey, and reach an agreement with the Sultan of Ternate.²³

Secondly, the Portuguese Governor had to welcome and to reassure the Asian trade communities, enabling the continuity of Melaka as a port open to international commerce. To instil confidence into both merchants and neighbouring powers was an uneasy task, so the Governor kept the basic structure of the city untouched, transformed the *bendahara* and the *tumenggong* Malay offices into the representatives of the Hindu and the Muslim merchants and preserved the low-customs policy that had formerly existed.²⁴ He also sent legacies to several kingdoms with messages of friendship and invitations to trade in Melaka, and issued safe-conducts. Albuquerque seemed to believe that it was possible to replace the head of the city, keeping the rest as it was before the conquest. The way he acted with the slaves of the Sultan, having announced that he would assure their keep and status as before, was an important step into this direction.²⁵

However, both issues were dependent on the ability to manage the regional balance and local relations, and ultimately to ensure the security of the city. This was definitely the most important and most difficult challenge, for it would require a clear perception of local conditions, something the Portuguese acquired only after the conquest. The target

²³ Manuel Lobato, *Política e Comércio dos Portugueses na Insulíndia – Malaca e as Molucas de 1575 a 1605*, Macao: Instituto Português do Oriente, 1999, pp. 97–98.

²⁴ Luís Filipe Thomaz, »Malaka et ses communautés marchandes au tournant du 16ème siècle«, in: Denys Lombard and Jean Aubin (eds.), *Marchands et hommes d'affaires asiatiques dans l'Océan Indien et la Mer de Chine*, Paris: École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1987, pp. 31–48.

²⁵ Luís Filipe Thomaz, *Early Portuguese Malacca*, Macao: CTMCDP, 2000, pp. 147–151.

of Portuguese attention was the city of Melaka, not the Strait. They did not perceive it as a delicate, multipolar region with several powers and they were not aware, therefore, of local geopolitics. Most probably, they saw Melaka as the dominant power in the region and would consider a single blow – the conquest of the city – as enough to establish Portuguese hegemony.

The reality was quite different: not only was there a balance of power over the Strait where several political centres played different roles, but they were also aligned according to a complexity of relations and genealogical connections among existing lineages – involving the sultans and the *bendaharas* – that defined a peculiar framework that the Portuguese gradually came to relate with.

This issue would be of secondary importance if the Portuguese victory over Mahmud Syah was complete; but it was not. The prominence of Melaka did not rely on a powerful fleet or fearful artillery, but on the high prestige of the Sultan's genealogy among neighbouring sultanates. The allegiance of the sea-based people of the Riau-Lingga archipelago that controlled the narrow passages of the Singapore straits, usually mentioned as *Orang Laut*, was also an important issue for evaluating the real power of the Melaka sultans.²⁶

Local traditions and practices concerning royal status and prestige were different from what the Portuguese were used to; cities could be taken and destroyed. But as long as the Sultan and his court survived, his power remained basically unharmed. Therefore, and acting accordingly to Southeast Asian war traditions, Mahmud Syah faded into the forest, waiting for the invaders to plunder the city and go away.²⁷ Instead, they remained and built a stone fortress, much to the surprise of the Sultan.²⁸ He later moved on and his successors founded the sultanate of Johor in the surrounding area, claiming the ancient prestige of the Srivijaya lineage and influence.²⁹ Therefore, two Melakas came to

²⁶ Pinto, *The Portuguese and the Straits of Melaka*, pp. 145–147.

²⁷ Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680*, 2 vols., New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1988, I, p. 122.

²⁸ Brás de Albuquerque, *Comentários do Grande Afonso de Albuquerque*, 2 vols., Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1978, II, pp. 146–147; João de Barros, *Ásia*, 9 vols., Lisbon: Liv. Sam Carlos, 1974–75, II, 2, p. 86.

²⁹ John R. Bowen, »Cultural Models for Historical Genealogies: The Case of the Melaka

co-exist after 1511: the Portuguese ruled over the former capital, but this was an empty shell; the living organism moved into a new one.

Managing the Strait

The legacy of Albuquerque's actions in Southeast Asia was a rather complex issue to pursue. The Portuguese were now the rulers of a first-rate emporium in East Asia; their network was the widest in the world, stretching from Lisbon to the Moluccas; it would soon spread into Japan and China, Melaka being the Eastern pillar of this extended structure. In 1513, the Governor presented a triumphant optimistic scenario to King D. Manuel, listing the local rulers who were in obeisance or open to receive the Portuguese: Sumatra, Kampar, Minangkabau, Pahang, »the principal King of Java« (i.e., Mojopahit), besides Siam, Pegu and Tenasserim; »all the kings of India are amazed and overwhelmed by the feat of Melaka«.³⁰ However, it was a fragile structure. Their control over the Strait was always frail despite having a superior naval force. Srivijaya and Malay Melaka had control over both sides of the Strait through political prominence; the Portuguese, on the contrary, were not able to exercise more than a shared hegemony, depending on their effective force and how they managed to relate with local powers.

The initial phase after 1511 was marked by tension with the former Sultan and his attempts to recover Melaka and to neutralize the Portuguese diplomatic efforts with local powers. Mahmud Syah, who moved first to Pahang, then to Pagoh and finally to Bintang, was a permanent threat to Portuguese navigation and diverted part of the trade destined for Melaka. Therefore, the Portuguese had an urgent need to gain the confidence of the surrounding sultanates and Muslim merchants. At the same time, it was convenient to counter-balance the growing prominence of the Hindu *Keling* in Melaka. So, the second Captain of Melaka, Jorge de Albuquerque, took a decisive step: he managed to reach an agreement with Raja Abdullah, the Sultan of Kampar. This character, despite being the nephew and son-in-law of the expelled Sultan, declared his allegiance to the Portuguese Crown and in 1514 was appoint-

Sultanate«, in: K. S. Sandhu and P. Wheatley (eds.), *Melaka: The Transformation of a Malay Capital c. 1400–1980*, 2 vols, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1983, I, p. 163.

³⁰ Letter from Afonso de Albuquerque to King D. Manuel, 30 November 1513, in: R. A. Bulhão Pato (ed.), *Cartas de Afonso de Albuquerque*, I, p. 138.

ed »Regent (*mangku bumi*) of the Moors and Gentiles« of Melaka.³¹ However, the backstage manoeuvres promoted by Mahmud Syah to undermine this alliance were eventually successful; shortly after, the Portuguese executed Raja Abdullah on a charge of treason, triggering a wave of shock and mistrust among neighbouring kingdoms and Muslim merchants against the Portuguese.

The Portuguese managed to defeat Mahmud Syah, apparently once and for all, in 1526, with a direct and successful strike on the Sultan's new seat in Bintang. But the sultanate moved away once again and his son would settle definitely in Johor. Later on, the relations between the two *Melakas* became gradually more cordial and less tense. A *modus vivendi* was established throughout the 16th century, in the shape of some sort of a shared control over the Strait. For about two decades, from the mid-1560s, there was even an informal agreement between the Sultan and the Portuguese Captain to share commodities and trade profits.³²

Melaka turned out to be the sole Portuguese stronghold in the Strait, but it seems that the initial project was to create a network of fortresses that could act as supporting or secondary positions in the region and, at the same time, to provide important supplies of pepper, produced in both Sumatra and Sunda. Such secondary settlements would reinforce the security of Melaka and reinsure Portuguese control over the Strait, for they were located on the opposite side of the Malay Peninsula. In the first case, the Portuguese established good relations with Pasai, at the northern tip of Sumatra, precisely at the entrance to the Strait. They came to impose some sort of a »protectorate« over the sultanate in a brief lapse of time (1521–1523), exploiting the internal tensions and the existence of several candidates for the throne.³³ The rise of Aceh, a new and hostile power that gradually extended its influence in the Strait and became the most resilient enemy of Melaka, compromised these initial plans.

³¹ Thomaz, »Nina Chatu«, pp. 503–505.

³² Pinto, *The Portuguese and the Straits of Melaka*, pp. 143–144.

³³ Jorge dos Santos Alves, *O Domínio do Norte de Samatra – a história dos sultanatos de Samudera-Pacém e de Achém, e das suas relações com os portugueses (1500–1580)*, Lisbon: Sociedade Histórica da Independência de Portugal, 1999, pp. 97–100.

East of Melaka, and following the failure of a permanent settlement in Sumatra, the Portuguese attempted to acquire some influence in Java. Several factors were at stake: the island was an important supplier of rice, the city-ports along the Northern coast were flourishing trade centres, there was an important pepper production in its western side (Sunda) and, finally, the adjacent Strait of Sunda was an alternative route to the Melaka passage. Therefore, it was convenient to have a foothold in the surrounding region. The Portuguese came to an agreement with the Hindu kingdom of Pajajaran, signing a formal treaty (according to which the local king would pay tribute in pepper) and leaving a stone pillar in order to »take effective possession in the name of His Highness«.³⁴ In Java, they tried to arrange an alliance with the Mojopahit empire. However, the spread of Islam and the expansion of several Javanese sultanates, like Japara and Demak, changed the tide and ultimately frustrated Portuguese intentions of a long-lasting settlement in the island.³⁵

After an initial anti-Muslim approach, in Southeast Asia as elsewhere, the Portuguese came to adopt a more flexible and practical position towards Islamic powers. The death of King Manuel definitely put an end to the megalomaniac projects of defeating Islam and recovering the Holy Land for Christendom. His son and successor John III had a much more pragmatic approach to Asian affairs and came to establish some sort of an informal peace agreement with the Ottoman Empire in order to lower tensions in the Indian Ocean and to allow trade to flourish.³⁶

The Strait of Melaka was distant from the recurrent tension that pervaded Portuguese activities in the Western Indian Ocean. The local balance between Melaka and neighbouring sultanates set the pace

³⁴ »Possession the captain Francisco de Sá took of the kingdom of Sunda in the name of King John III«, July 29, 1527, in: *As Gavetas da Torre do Tombo*, 12 vols, Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1968, VII, pp. 562–563.

³⁵ Luís Filipe Thomaz, »O Malogrado Estabelecimento Oficial dos Portugueses em Sunda e a Islamização da Java«, in: Luís Filipe Thomaz (ed.), *Aquém e Além da Taprobana – estudos luso-orientais à memória de Jean Aubin e Denys Lombard*, Lisbon: Centro de História de Além-Mar, 2002, pp. 429–440; Jorge dos Santos Alves, »L’Inscription du padrão de Banten (1522)«, in: *Archipel*, 47, 1994, pp. 23–34.

³⁶ Luís Filipe Thomaz, *A Questão da Pimenta em meados do século XVI*, Lisbon: Universidade Católica Portuguesa, 1998, pp. 79–80.

of commercial activities and political relations. The practical needs of survival in a potentially hostile environment came to overlap any other concerns of the Portuguese authorities. The Strait was an indispensable door to access the Far East that became, in the late 16th century, a vital target for both Portuguese merchants and missionaries, with the axis of Macao-Nagasaki clearly rising as the most profitable line of trade. Therefore, keeping the Strait open to Portuguese navigation was a priority and the authorities were permanently worried about possible threats that could jeopardize this vital sea-lane.

Theoretically, the Portuguese claimed global control over Asian navigation all across the Indian Ocean, through the so-called *cartazes*, safe-conducts issued by the Portuguese authorities conceded to friendly and allied powers, authorizing specific lines of trade. Any ship that sailed without these documents was at risk of being seized. It was implemented in the Arabian Sea as early as 1503, in order to distinguish friends from foes and to protect those against the common privateering practices by the Portuguese.³⁷ It was a political tool rather than an economic one, for it was mainly destined to manage relations with Asian powers in the initial years of competition between the Cape Route and the traditional Levant one. In the Strait of Melaka and in Southeast Asia, its use was very limited. Authorizations of this kind were issued by the Captain of Melaka according to his own judgement and following what was considered to be the general interests of the city. For instance, in 1521, Captain Jorge de Albuquerque gave *cartazes* to several merchants in the Coromandel ports to persuade them to go to Melaka.³⁸ Later, this sort of safe-conducts included a main item, forbidding the transportation of Acehnese, who were considered to be enemies of Melaka.³⁹

In practical terms, the Portuguese »rule« over the Strait came to be imposed not over neighbouring powers as an official strategy, but in an informal way: on Asian mercantile communities that traditionally

³⁷ Luís Filipe Thomaz, »Do Cabo Espichel a Macau: vicissitudes do curso português«, in: Artur Teodoro de Matos e Luís Filipe Thomaz (eds.), *As Relações entre a Índia Portuguesa, a Ásia do Sueste e o Extremo Oriente*, Macao/Lisbon, 1993, pp. 552–553.

³⁸ Luís Filipe Thomaz, *Os Portugueses em Malaca*, Lisbon, 1964, unpublished thesis, I, p. 185.

³⁹ Diogo do Couto, *Da Ásia*, 15 vols., Lisbon: Liv. Sam Carlos, 1974–75, X, 2, p. 206.

used Melaka as a port of call. It took the form of patrolling *armadas* that reassured the safety of the passage to both Portuguese and Asian navigation but were also used to force merchant ships to go to Melaka instead of other neighbouring – and rival – ports: »it is truly necessary to always have our *armadas* [in the Strait of Singapore and Sabang]to collect the ships, both ours and of the people that are our friends and come to this fortress and pay their customs duties.«⁴⁰

This practice – that has been called »forced trade«⁴¹ – became usual in the late 16th century, and came to reduce the ability of Melaka to attract Asian traders. It became critical as the Captains of the fortress gradually grabbed the most important lines of commerce associated with Melaka and committed frequent extortions, claiming exclusive rights and forcing prices and favourable conditions to buy and sell commodities. When their demands were excessive or they acted in a violent way, traders avoided the city and looked for other ports where conditions were more peaceful or favourable. Complaints about these despotic acts by the Captains and the decreasing number of Asian merchants in the city are common in all Portuguese documentation and other coeval sources. The clearest example may have been the one of Chinese merchants (namely the *chinchéus* from Fujian), who gradually removed themselves from Melaka, not only because they had more convenient ports at their disposal, like Banten, but also because of the extortions exercised by the Portuguese, something that was even echoed in official Ming records.⁴²

A Triangle

The Sultanate of Aceh gradually emerged as the most powerful and defiant enemy over the 130 years of Portuguese rule of Melaka.⁴³ Once a small power, it rose as the most important node of the re-oriented

⁴⁰ »News from India«, 1605, in: *Documentação Ultramarina Portuguesa*, Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1960, I, p. 147.

⁴¹ Lobato, *Política e Comércio*, p. 197–199.

⁴² »History of the Ming Dynasty«, in: W. P. Groeneveldt (ed.), »Notes on the Malay Archipelago and Malacca«, *Miscellaneous Papers Relating to Indo-China and the Indian Archipelago*, London: Trubner & Co., 1887, I, pp. 253–254.

⁴³ Hamirul Hadi, *Islam and State in Sumatra – A Study of Seventeenth Century Aceh*, Leiden: Brill, 2004, pp. 21–36.

and reorganized Muslim trade networks after the fall of Melaka to the Portuguese, mostly based on the reinvigorated Gujarati community that defied the Portuguese trade structures from Southeast Asia to the Red Sea.⁴⁴ But Aceh was not just an important rival in trade affairs. It also became an expanding power that gradually extended its control over the pepper-producing areas of Sumatra and tried to dominate other Malay sultanates. This expansion would bring about a tense and delicate balance among the three main powers that shared, so to speak, the hegemony in the Strait: Aceh, Melaka and Johor.⁴⁵

In the 1560s, Portuguese presence in Asia confronted a new, globally adverse scenario, marked by coordinated strikes from several Muslim powers across the Indian Ocean on Portuguese positions and navigation. The Portuguese *Estado da Índia* was ill-prepared to repel the offensive, being under a complex process of reform that affected the whole overseas empire.⁴⁶ In Southeast Asia, Aceh claimed the role of an Islamic vanguard against the *peringgi*, as the Portuguese were locally called. Formal contacts with the Ottoman Empire were established – two envoys were sent to Istanbul in 1562 to purchase artillery and to hire gunners and cannon founders, and a legate was dispatched to Banda Aceh to escort the envoys back – allegedly to prepare for war against the Portuguese.⁴⁷

In fact, relations between Aceh and Melaka had been unstable in the previous decades, ranging from peaceful trade to incidental hostility, but the new environment led to a state of open war. Its most visible expression was the sieges of Melaka carried out by Aceh in 1568 and three consecutive attempts in the 1570s. It also involved a widespread attack on Portuguese navigation in the Strait region, causing a moment of general danger for navigation with attacks and reprisals from the

⁴⁴ C. R. Boxer, »A Note on Portuguese Reactions to the Revival of the Red Sea Spice Trade and the Rise of Atjeh, 1540–1600«, in: *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, X, 1969, pp. 416–428.

⁴⁵ Paulo Jorge de Sousa Pinto, »Melaka, Johor and Aceh. A bird's eye view over a Portuguese-Malay triangular balance«, in: *Arquivos do Centro Cultural Calouste Gulbenkian*, XXXI, 1996, pp. 117–121.

⁴⁶ Luís Filipe Thomaz, »A Crise de 1565–1575 na História do Estado da Índia«, in: *Mare Liberum*, 9, 1995, pp. 481–519.

⁴⁷ Giancarlo Casale, »His Majesty's Servant Lufti – the career of a previously unknown sixteenth-century Ottoman envoy to Sumatra based on an account of his travels from the Topkapı Palace Archives«, in: *Turcica*, 37, 2005, pp. 49–52.

Portuguese and their Malay and Javanese neighbours.⁴⁸ The situation forced the authorities in Lisbon to take unprecedented measures: to dispatch an *armada* directly to Melaka in 1576 under the command of Matias de Albuquerque, that was able to remove the threat and to re-establish minimum levels of security for Portuguese ships in the area.⁴⁹

In the following decade, the issue of controlling the Strait and keeping the sea-passage safe for Portuguese shipping became critical. A new, disturbing fact emerged from the political balance inside the Melaka-Johor-Aceh triangle. The two rival sultanates came closer, a change that raised the alarm amongst Portuguese ranks. In fact, despite the proclaimed Islamic solidarity and the apparent support of the Acehnese *jihād*, Johor had been previously very suspicious and reluctant to give some effective support against Melaka. Aceh was a more menacing threat than the Portuguese. The Sultans were aware of the fact that the fall of Melaka into Acehnese hands would unbalance the geopolitical scenario of the Strait. Moreover, their capital Johor Lama was attacked by Aceh forces in 1564, who took the Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah prisoner, and four years later the new Sultan Muzaffar Syah joined the Portuguese against the Acehnese siege on Melaka.⁵⁰

But in the decade of 1580, the conditions changed and the two sultanates established an alliance against the Portuguese. The motives were essentially of a political nature: both in Johor and in Aceh new rulers came to power and opted for a mutually beneficial agreement, sealed by a marriage. Melaka was therefore in a dangerous position; the basic survival strategy of the Portuguese in the Strait region had been the mistrust between the rivals. A hostile Aceh-Johor alliance was a risk that should be taken seriously, because it could foreshadow more vigorous attacks on Melaka and on Portuguese trade and a general blockade on both sides of the Strait.

⁴⁸ Hubert Jacobs, »Un Réglement de Comptes entre Portugais et Javanais dans les Mers de l'Indonésie en 1580«, in: *Archipel*, 18, 1979, pp. 159–173.

⁴⁹ Manuel Lobato, »A Carreira da Índia e a variante de Malaca (1507–1641)«, in: *A Carreira da Índia e as Rotas dos Estreitos – Actas do VIII Seminário Internacional de História Indoportuguesa*, Angra do Heroísmo, 1998, pp. 356–358.

⁵⁰ Diogo do Couto, *Da Ásia*, VIII, pp. 144, 168–170; António Pinto Pereira, *História da Índia no tempo em que a governou o Visorei Dom Luís de Ataíde*, Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1987, p. 236.

In Aceh, the new Sultan Mansur Syah (1579–1586) was a foreigner from Perak. His alliance with Johor may have been a solution to achieve external support in order to compensate for his obvious lack of internal strength. According to Portuguese sources, he was a fierce enemy of the Portuguese and was responsible for the execution of some, namely the highly praised martyrdom of Luís Monteiro Coutinho, in 1584.⁵¹ Later on, the Portuguese authorities in Lisbon were informed that he was building a fortress in his homeland, Perak. They feared that it would be a supportive base of operations for Acehnese fleets that could attack Melaka more easily and intercept Portuguese movements to and from India.⁵² A blockade was to be feared, especially if in co-ordination with a similar move from Johor, on the Eastern side, i.e., the Singapore Straits, something that effectively took place in 1585–87.

Ironically, the most serious threat posed to Melaka in the late 16th century did not come from Aceh but from Johor. The Sultan Ali Jalla Abdul Jalil Syah (1580–1597) achieved unprecedented prominence in the regional balance, thanks to his diplomatic skills and political leadership. Under his command, Johor managed to slowly emerge as the hegemonic power in the Strait region, thanks to a carefully outlined policy towards Melaka and Aceh. About the Portuguese, Ali Jalla understood that the power in Melaka was in the hands of the Captains, who at this time virtually controlled most of the trade in the city. Therefore, he came to renew and reinforce an informal agreement already operative since the 1560s: Javanese trade – the most important community that supplied Melaka with spices and other commodities – was diverted to Johor, where taxes and customs were paid, in an apparent imitation of the abovementioned Portuguese »forced trade« practices.⁵³ Both the Sultan and the Portuguese Captain profited, but the Royal Treasury in Melaka was considerably damaged.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Manuel Godinho de Erédia, *História de Serviços com Martírio de Luís Monteiro Coutinho*, Biblioteca Nacional, Lisbon, Res. 414; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, »Pulverized in Aceh: On Luís Monteiro Coutinho and his »Martyrdom«, in: *Archipel*, 78, 2009, pp. 19–60.

⁵² Letter from the Viceroy of Portugal to King Phillip I, Dec. 12 1586, Archivo General de Simancas, *Secretarias Provinciales*, lib. 1550, fl. 701; letter from King Phillip I to the Viceroy of India D. Duarte de Meneses, Jan. 21 1587, in: Basilio de Sá (ed.), *Documentação*, V, p. 63.

⁵³ Lobato, *Política e Comércio*, p. 197.

⁵⁴ Pinto, *The Portuguese and the Straits of Melaka*, pp. 86–87.

While managing to control, to some extent, the Portuguese menace (he openly boasted that he did not fear the Portuguese because they were too greedy), Ali Jalla made an alliance, sealed with a marriage, with the new Acehnese Sultan. His plan most probably included a co-ordinated double blockade on Melaka and a direct attack that would defeat the isolated Portuguese, as soon as his Acehnese allies had finished their arrangements, as mentioned above.

The Portuguese were fully aware of the danger. They acknowledge the prestige of Johor among the Malay sultanates, calling him »Emperor of all the Malays«.⁵⁵ The allegiance of the sea-based people of the Riau-Lingga Archipelago that controlled the straits of Singapore was also a threat to consider. Clear and disturbing information about the »noose around Melaka's neck« started to reach the authorities in Goa.⁵⁶

The Portuguese reaction eventually frustrated his global plans and forced him to move forward prematurely, launching a preventive attack on Melaka at the beginning of 1587. Later, the Portuguese captured an envoy from Johor on his way to Aceh, through whom they found out that Ali Jalla was waiting to join forces to attack Melaka. He had with him a letter addressed to the Sultan of Aceh with the following words: »Melaka is like a seed field; without water, it dries, so stand by and come, for I'll be with you with my fleet to take it together.«⁵⁷ Meanwhile, Mansur Syah died and neither the double blockade nor the joint strike on Melaka took place.

However, Johor managed to blockade the Strait of Singapore, preventing the passage of the expected *armada* from Macao, and fully diverted Javanese trade to his capital. The arrival of a rescue fleet from Goa, under the command of D. Paulo de Lima Pereira, and the attack and destruction of the capital Johor Lama put an end to this episode. Like Mahmud Syah had done half a century before, the Sultan fled the city and founded another capital a few miles upriver.

Until the end of the century, Melaka was able to keep the Strait passage open and without further disturbances. Internal turbulence in

⁵⁵ Diogo do Couto, *Da Ásia*, VIII, p. 166; other sources in Pinto, *The Portuguese and the Straits of Melaka*, p. 147, note 72.

⁵⁶ Letter from Viceroy D. Duarte de Meneses to King Phillip I, Nov. 23 1587, Archivo General de Simancas, *Secretarias Provinciales*, lib. 1551, fl. 71v.

⁵⁷ Diogo do Couto, *Da Ásia*, X, 2, p. 445.

Aceh and a new period of distrust among the two sultanates foreshadowed a peaceful management of the Strait. Moreover, in 1592 the Acehnese Sultan Alauddin Riayat Syah al-Mukammil (1589–1604) made an unexpected peace offer, in the aftermath of the shipwreck of a *nau* on the shores of Sumatra, on its way from Goa to Macao. It was not a simple truce: in exchange for the return of the Portuguese (the Bishop of Macao being among them) and a peace treaty, the Sultan required permission to go along the Strait and to pass through Melaka with his war fleet *en route* to Johor, without being harmed by Portuguese forces. It was the prelude to a brief and unprecedented period of intense diplomatic contacts and exchange of embassies, gifts and projects, during which the Sultan promised to provide cargoes of pepper to the Portuguese and to authorize them to erect a fortress in his kingdom. Melaka enjoyed a period of regional prominence, taking advantage of renewed mutual hostility between Aceh and Johor. As the Viceroy D. Francisco da Gama put it in a letter to the King, »With Our Lord's help, they will destroy each other.«⁵⁸ It was brief, however, for a far more serious threat was on its way.

A Changing Tide

By the turn of the century, the Portuguese soldier Francisco Rodrigues Silveira had written a premonitory opinion in his work about the much needed reformation of the Portuguese *Estado da Índia*: »Today, these individuals from Zeeland have come in right under the nose of the Viceroy, plundering and upsetting the trade and commerce in spices: and tomorrow, due to our own lack of order, they will try to evict us from our own houses.«⁵⁹ The most visible impact of the Dutch arrival in Asia would be felt in Southeast Asia. Unlike the Portuguese, whose presence spread from Mozambique to Japan, the Dutch concentrated their efforts on a few specific spots in the region, in areas where Portuguese naval forces were sparse and where the most coveted commodities could be found, namely Sumatra, Sunda and the Moluccas. The first Dutch expedition to the East went directly to Banten via the Sunda Strait, and the

⁵⁸ Letter from D. Francisco da Gama to Phillip I, April 1598, Biblioteca Nacional, Lisbon, Res. 1976, fl. 91v.

⁵⁹ Francisco Rodrigues Silveira, *Reformaço da Milícia e Governo do Estado da Índia Oriental*, Lisbon: Fundação Oriente, 1996, p. 90.

second one to Aceh. In the initial years, the Dutch avoided the passage through the Melaka Strait in order to escape Portuguese *armadas* and to lay the foundations of what would be the Dutch East Indies. One might say that it was the first time that the Sunda Strait outpaced the Melaka one as a commercial target and a political priority.

However, it was just a provisional option. As the punitive efforts by the Portuguese authorities to fight them failed one after the other, their presence in the Melaka Strait became frequent. The first serious blow to the Portuguese presence in the area took place in 1603 in a famous episode, the capture of the Portuguese carrack *Santa Catarina* in the Johor River.⁶⁰ It was now clear that the initial period of compromise was over and the new V.O.C. Company definitely opted for assaulting Portuguese navigation in Asia, prompting a big debate over free trade, natural rights and international law.⁶¹ Not only were the Portuguese ships now under risk of being seized by the European enemies, but Melaka itself became a target, having suffered a hard siege in 1606.

Besides the gradual hostility towards the Portuguese, Dutch penetration in the region followed a clear strategy: to find adequate sources of spices and establish themselves in these centres through commercial treaties, and to look for political alliances that would give them stability and support against the rival Portuguese. Generally speaking, they were welcomed in most places where they progressively established trade agreements.

In the Strait of Melaka, the balance gradually became hostile to Portuguese interests. In Aceh, negotiations for a treaty dragged on for several years without visible results. The Portuguese hesitated between an agreement and the use of force. However, in 1605 a powerful *armada*, under the command of the Viceroy of India, arrived in the region to expel the Dutch from the Strait region. On its way to Melaka, he decided to launch an attack on Banda Aceh, with disastrous conse-

⁶⁰ Peter Borschberg, »The Seizure of the *Sta. Catarina* Revisited: The Portuguese Empire in Asia, VOC Politics and the Origins of the Dutch-Johor Alliance (1602–c.1616)«, in: *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 33, 1, 2002, pp. 31–62.

⁶¹ Two recent works have shed light on these questions and the legal issues that followed the capture of the *Santa Catarina*: Martine Julia van Ittersum, *Profit and Principle: Hugo Grotius, Natural Rights Theories and the Rise of Dutch Power in the East Indies (1595–1615)*, Leiden: Brill, 2006) and Peter Borschberg, *Hugo Grotius, the Portuguese and Free Trade in the East Indies*, Singapore: NUS Press, 2011.

quences. The accession of Iskandar Muda to the throne, two years later, definitely brought to an end the period of truce between Melaka and Aceh. However, the Dutch did not take advantage of this scenario. The incoming Sultan started a new period of territorial expansion and strict control of pepper production that was not compatible with the aspirations of the VOC. Therefore, the relations between Aceh and the Dutch were always marked by sharp tension and mutual mistrust.

The case of Johor was substantially different: the arrival of the Dutch gave the sultanate the opportunity to be reassured of its position and relieve the pressure from the Portuguese and Aceh. In 1602, the first contacts with Jacob van Heemskerck took place and the Sultan sent legates to the United Provinces, preparing an agreement. At the same time, the former Captain of Melaka Francisco da Silva de Meneses attacked a junk from Johor and killed all the passengers, including an ambassador *en route* to Perak.⁶² The incident of the *Santa Catarina* in the following year caused a definitive rupture between Melaka and Johor and pushed the sultanate into a formal alliance with the Dutch.

The Portuguese tried to paddle against the tide, preparing strong *armadas* destined to defeat and expel the Dutch fleets and to punish the Asian powers that welcomed them, but with no effect. The last attempt took place in 1615–1616, when a joint *armada* from Manila and Melaka, gathering naval resources from both Portuguese and Spanish structures, failed to achieve any success.⁶³ At this time, the Portuguese revived old projects of erecting new fortresses in several spots, in order to combat the Dutch penetration in a more effective way. In the Melaka Strait, there were proposals to erect fortresses in the narrow passages of Singapore and to have continuous patrolling fleets in the area to obstruct the passage of Dutch ships.⁶⁴ There are a few hints about the erection of a fortification in Muar by Manuel Godinho de Erédia in 1604, but it is doubtful that it was ever more than a project.

⁶² Jacques de Coutre, *Andanzas Asiáticas*, Madrid: Historia 16, 1991, p. 165.

⁶³ Peter Borschberg, »Security, VOC Penetration and Luso-Spanish Co-operation: The Armada of Philippine Governor Juan de Silva in the Straits of Singapore, 1616«, in: Peter Borschberg (ed.), *Iberians in the Singapore-Melaka Area*, pp. 35–62.

⁶⁴ For instance, by Jacques de Coutre, »Information urging the building of some castles or fortifications in Singapore Strait and other parts of the South«, 1628, in: B. N. Teensma (ed.), *Como Remediar o Estado da Índia?*, Leiden: Leiden Centre for the history of European Expansion, 1989, pp. 16–21.

Harassed by all sides, suffering from the competition moved by the Dutch VOC and the English EIC and struggling with a serious financial crisis, the *Estado da Índia* was in no condition to release funds for such proposals. In 1619, the Viceroy of India confessed that he did not have »a dime« to spare for the erection of new fortresses, no matter how much smaller they might be, and the available money was not even enough for the regular *armadas*.⁶⁵

Facing a tremendous challenge by the Dutch, gradually losing its prestige in the regional balance and no longer able to attract – or force – Asian trade communities to be present, Melaka declined. According to the chronicler António Bocarro, 1615 was the last year in which nutmeg and mace were sold in the city.⁶⁶ In fact, the Dutch imposed their hostile presence in the Strait and forced Portuguese navigation to adopt defensive strategies: the carracks loaded with Chinese commodities from Macao passed the Strait with an escort *armada* and local traffic made use of small-oared ships, more likely to evade Dutch surveillance. The city's fortifications were improved throughout the following decades, giving Melaka the semblance of a stronghold.

Initially established in Banten, the Dutch moved in 1619 to Batavia, in accordance with the ambitious plans of the Governor Jan Pieterszoon Coen (1619–1623/1627–1629). The headquarters of the VOC were definitely settled in Sunda, giving the Company full access to the two passages, the Strait of Melaka and the Sunda one. In the decade of the 1630s, Dutch power over the Portuguese was complete: the strategy adopted by the Governor Antonio van Diemen (1636–1645) focused on the blockade of the nerve centres of the *Estado da Índia*, namely Goa and Melaka. Isolated and impaired, struggling for its survival, the city finally surrendered to the Dutch in 1641, after a long siege.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Letter from the Viceroy D. João Coutinho to Phillip II, Feb. 28 1619, IV, in: R. A. Bulhão Pato (ed.), *Documentos Remetidos da Índia*, 5 vols., Lisbon: Academia Real das Ciências, 1893, IV, p. 352.

⁶⁶ António Bocarro, *Década 13 da História da Índia*, 2 vols., Lisbon: Academia Real das Ciências, 1876, I, p. 461.

⁶⁷ P. A. Leupe, »The Siege and Capture of Malacca from the Portuguese in 1640–1641: Extracts from the Archives of the Dutch East India Company«, in: *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 14, 1, 1936, pp. 1–178.